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The Red Terror and The White, 1919.

LECTURE BY RABBI ABBA H. SILVER ON "THE
RED TERROR AND THE WHITE." AT THE TEMPLE
EAST 55th STREET AND CENTRAL AVENUE, SUN-
DAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 30, 1919, CLEVELAND,
OHIO.

There are to my mind two kinds of terrors--the red terror and the white. Much has been said of late concerning the red terror; little has been said of late concerning the white terror. Now, the red terror is brought about by the concerted action on the part of men who are determined to overthrow the present economic system by means of force. The white terror is brought about by the concerted action on the part of men who are determined to conserve the present economic system in all its detail by means of force. The means utilized by the red and the white are both fair and foul, and underlying both is a lie--the lie of force.

Now, to my mind, the white terror is a more invidious thing even than the red terror, because the red terror makes no pious pretenses, assumes no sanctimonious airs. It sets out clearly and openly to establish a dictatorship of the proletarian, and is reconciled to the use of every instrument that comes handy. The white terror sets out with pious airs in the name of liberty and democracy, and law and order, and utilizes the same

instruments for which it denounces the red terror. stop p. 4

The white terror sometimes uses the same instruments as the red. In the case of Finland, for example, the White instituted a veritable reign of terror. Denikine and Kolchak in the name of democracy and law and order vied with Lenine and Trotsky in mob terrorism, in bloodshed, in violence, in unscrupulousness.

Now, in other lands the means are less barbarous but just as harmful, and they consist in the suppression of free speech, in the suppression of the right of public assembly, in the ridding of places of meeting, in riots, in various propaganda to stupify men, to terrify people by waving before their eyes the bloody rag of revolution. I say that underlying both the red and the white terror is the lie of force--that truth can be established and maintained by force. I think it was Rousseau who said that ^{the} strongest is never strong enough to remain all the time master. Physical force implies no moral compulsion; physical force is legitimate only as long as it is most powerful. When another force greater than it asserts itself, then that force becomes legitimate. Force must be translated into right or it remains eternally wrong. And it matters little whether the force is exercised by a small minority or a large majority; it matters not whether force is exercised by the unwashed or by the well-groomed of humanity--it is equally vicious and destructive of the fundamental goods of human society.

There was a very pert doctrine, you know, among the privileged classes of yesterday,—that the end justified the means. That notion was very popular among religious bodies in the middle ages, and in the name of some glorious end they utilized the foulest means of oppression and suppression; in the name of a glorious ultimate goal they sent men to the stake and to the gallows and to the block and tortured heretics and dissenters; in the name of a glorious end the red terrorists of Russia are sacrificing the sacred rights and privileges of the individual, and in the name of a glorious end the white terrorists are sacrificing the preciously inherited and dearly purchased, the blood-redeemed rights of human beings. The fallacy of it all is that none of us know what the ultimate end is, what the ultimate good for society is, but we do know the means that were used, whether they are right or wrong. And the Reds and the Whites utilize means that are obviously and palpably wrong to attain an end that is problematic and uncertain.

There is another fallacy underlying the doctrine of force, and that is that ideas can be suppressed or established by means of force. Now, nobody has ever made two times two equal five by means of bayonets, and nobody has ever succeeded ⁱⁿ squaring the circle by instituting a reign of terror. Ideas, if they are true, are essentially spiritual qualities; they are born out of the needs of human life; they are nurtured and fostered

by these same needs, and they are ultimately enthroned by the pressing and compelling needs of human life. Force can thwart the idea, force can delay it, force can keep it from becoming popular and effective, but force cannot definitely and permanently stifle it any more than the hand of a human being can permanently stifle a volcano; any more than you can cork the effervescent liquid down tight enough; it will explode ultimately by sheer inherent force of expansion, and in the explosion it will reap havoc all around it. And an idea that is not true, an idea that is a lie cannot be enthroned by force. You may pamper that idea and you may protect it, and you may coddle it up awfully tight, and you may surround it with ten thousand bayonets, but it will perish of its own self, it will die of a spiritual consumption. Force can enthrone it for a moment, but life will ultimately dethrone it because it is a dead thing, it does not respond to the needs of human life.

Why do I speak of this all? Because I believe that we are today being stampeded into a psychology of intolerance, of bigotry; because I believe that we are losing that gracious quality of being able to listen patiently to another man's opinion, even if that opinion differs radically from ours; because we have lost the ~~great~~ capacity for looking at truth even if truth is ugly and unattractive; because men are terrifying us into a veritable intellectual stupidity; because we are

being victimized by a systematic propaganda to keep us from thorough-going reforms, by waving before our eyes the spectre of revolution, the danger of radicalism.

I read day after day of men being sentenced to terms in prison because they dared to criticize the president, or because they dared to criticize a mayor, or because they distributed some stupid, meaningless pamphlets attacking the government for interfering in Russia, and using unguarded language. I read daily of meeting halls being raided and men hurried to police stations upon no specific charges; I read of newspaper offices being broken into by infuriated mobs, self-appointed protectors of American loyalty; I read of men dragged off platforms and refused the privilege of being heard. I read of these things so constantly that one is prone to ask one's self-- what is becoming of our common sense, of our sense of fairness of our supreme confidence, and the soundness and the wholesomeness of our institutions? Where is the dignity, the courage, the strength of conviction that can be magnanimous and tolerant before an opinion?

I say, men and women, that a nation that can be thrown into hysterics by a few irresponsible agitators and pamphleteers,--that there is something wrong with the conscience of that nation, and we are playing into the hands of these very agitators because their desire is to confuse and confound us, to make us nervous, to lose our balance and poise. As long as America remains proudly well-poised and balanced, doing its work, disregarding

these little petty things, so long will the work of these extreme agitators remain unavailing. Our institutions are sound; it is our minds that are unsound. We are nervous and we imagine things. // We imagine, for example, that the tragedy which has taken place in Russia may also come to pass in the United States, forgetting totally the fact that conditions in the United States are utterly, completely and thoroughly different from conditions in Russia. Russia was ripe for revolution, and Russia was ripe for an extreme doctrine of reorganization. Russia had an exploited working class steeped in poverty; Russia had an undeveloped middle class; Russia had a landless, poverty-stricken peasantry; Russia had a frightful illiteracy, and Russia had no channel for the expression of popular will and sentiment. But conditions in the United States are radically different. The working man in the United States on the whole is more highly paid, better fed, has greater opportunities for comfort, for education, for amusement than the working man in any other land upon the face of the earth. In America there is a highly developed middle class that is politically and economically powerful. In America there is a highly developed, contented, propertied farmer class; in America there is a common education for all, and in America there are immediate channels for the expression of the sentiments and will of the people. So that to imagine that a revolution such

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as has swept and destroyed Russia can come to the United States is the imagination of a feverish, frightened mind, a mind distorted by the propaganda of interested parties.

We must not permit ourselves to become scared; we must not permit ourselves to become intolerant; we must not permit ourselves to swerve from our definite goal, namely, to make real and effective democracy in our land. This is not the time to be reactionary or extremely conservative. This is the time of plasticity; this is the time we can mold and fashion new institutions of more gracious proportions. This is the time when the sentiments and spirit of men are alert, searching, eager, inquisitive, and we must not, because of fear, run back to our ancient molds, to our ancient forms. We must press forward, fully confident that the only recipe for enduring peace, the only antidote for revolution, is greater, and still greater, and still greater--democracy.

We must keep the public forum open and free.

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We have paid too dear a price for the freedom of expression now to stifle it because it is sometimes abused. No man has more nobly expressed this thought than the Justice of the Supreme Court, Mr. Holmes, in a recent decision. Mr. Holmes says: "But when men have realized that time has upset many * * *, they may come to believe more than they believe the very foundations of their own conduct, that the ultimate good desired is better reached by free trade in ideas, that the best test of truth is the

power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market, and that truth is the only ground upon which their issues safely can be carried out."

We must, to my mind, return to a peace footing. We must repeal the wartime measure, the espionage law. We must not try to carry over into peace the measures that were necessary in times of war. If we are sincerely interested in the preservation of the present economic arrangement, if we believe that our economic organization of private ownership and initiative is sound, that it contributes to the greatest good of the greatest number, then we must try to make that economic organization as appealing, as attractive, as beautiful as it possibly can be; and above all we must not confess our own weakness, our own uncertainty by feverish, unreasoned, blind intolerance of other opinions. If we are sure of our ground we need not be afraid of meeting men in public, and discussing our position with them. The surest way, to my mind, of establishing peace and order in our land is not that hasty, simple, naive way of the club of the policeman, of the injunction of the magistrate, of the lawyer or politician, who would interpret the clear, definite statement of the Constitution that congress is to enact no law that would abridge the right of free speech in the United States, in such a manner that the Constitution would become a helpless and a pathetic thing.

The sure way is not the way of Ole Hansenism; the sure way is not the way of Guy Empkeism; the sure way is not the way of self-appointed leagues for the protection of American democracy, that seems to be the most attractive today because it seems to be the most immediate--but it is the least effective because it is the least thorough; it does not go to the heart, to the root of the problem. The surest way is first by removing every barrier, every dike that confines the free expression of ideas in this land. Let ideas clash, let there be an exchange and conflict of opinion, out of which a truth will come that is the philosophy of democracy. There is so much inherent strength in truth that it can overcome a thousand lies ultimately.

Let us set about making our economic organization today attractive to men; let us set about honestly to destroy that cancer of the human institution, that coercive disease--poverty, that destroys not only the physical life of man, but the moral and the spiritual life. Poverty, that is the enemy of true culture, of civilization; poverty, that is the enemy of true religion. Let us set about honestly to destroy it, to destroy the slums, and the ghettos, and the filth, and the ugliness of our large cities. In a land such as ours, filled with the grace and the benediction of God Almighty, there need be no poverty except such as comes from indolence and laziness; there need be no ugliness

incidental to honest labor and honest effort.

We dare not assume a philosophy of indifference and say these things must always be. They need not always be, and they are because you and I are indifferent to them. Let us set about protecting childhood and womanhood, saving them from the destructive strain of early industrial life. Let us set about giving the working man a sense of independence, and a sense of pride by identifying him closely with the industry in which he works, so that he will feel himself not merely a tool but a fellow creator, a working man with a fellow working man.

Let us try honestly to distribute a little more equitably the social goods, a little less to those who have too much and a little more to those who have too little. Let us set about honestly to extend and increase opportunities for education, for self culture, for fine amusement. Let us democratize as far as possible the advantages of art and culture and learning to all. Let us kill revolution by establishing happy homes, by building over this spacious land of ours millions and millions of happy firesides. Do not, for the salvation of your own soul, say to yourself that the time has come for a show-down with labor. I have heard so many business men in recent weeks exaltingly express that sentiment--that now is the time for a fight to the finish. Well, an attitude like that is an attitude of hostility and antagonism, and it can inspire only a corresponding attitude of

hostility and antagonism on the part of labor.

This is not a question of a show-down; this is a question of finding ways and means of establishing real co-operation between the working man and his employer; and the spirit of give and take, the spirit of friendliness, the spirit of compromise, the spirit of honesty and justice, even when justice hurts, is the spirit that will win out.

Lastly, the sure way of avoiding menace and danger and unpleasantness in our land is the way, long, it is true, but sure--of education; education through free and open discussion of public problems, education through an honest press. It is heart-breaking to see how little of truth men receive today from their newspaper. Somehow our press has become, consciously or unconsciously, willingly or unwillingly, an instrument in the hands of such men who are interested in stifling every new idea just because it is new, and every new reform just because it is a reform. Education through honest newspapers, education through our schools and our high schools and our universities, where our young men and our young women will be taught not to prostrate themselves in reverence and awe before the god of things as they are, but to worship in reverence before the god of the future, the god of infinite promise for economic life.

We are today in a period of transition; we are a nation in the becoming; we are an instrument; we are

growing daily, and the leaders of tomorrow, our educated classes that come from our colleges and our universities, must be inspired with the conviction that democracy is not a ready-made thing, to be accepted or rejected, but that it is a philosophy of life that is progressive, creative, dynamic, constantly changing, constantly adjusting itself to new conditions as new situations present themselves. And education of ourselves, education to the realization of the abiding, constantly uprooting truths of ^{the} social and economic life.

I sometimes think that no man should be permitted to become an employer of labor unless he had previously qualified for it, even as a physician must qualify, even as a lawyer must qualify. The employer must educate himself first in psychology; he must understand human nature, and the human material that he works with. He must understand economic organization, economic administration, efficient organization; he must understand above all political economy, the purposes of industry,--that industry is not an end in itself; that industry is an agency like art, like science, like religion--to serve the greater needs of human life; that industry is beneficent only as long as it increases the social well being and the social good; as long as it enables men to grow and develop through their work, so long is industry a beneficent social institution. When industry destroys initiative, when industry degrades character, when industry makes the development of personality impossible in the

working man, when industry becomes a passion of greed and lust, of acquisitiveness; when industry becomes a selfish tool for aggrandizement, then industry is a social malady to be swept aside.

Education of the working man, too. The man who labors must realize that he is a social servant, that he serves not his boss or his superior, but society in producing the goods which society needs. He must be educated to work in a spirit of loyalty to the job; he must be educated to work as an artist and not merely as an artisan. He must be educated to see the sacredness, the divinity, the nobility of his task; and he can be educated to that.

If you do not surround his work with tawdriness, with uncleanness, with crudeness; if you do not throw him after his day's work into a dirty shack to spend a few leisure hours of his days; if you make his human life a place of real rest, and recuperation, of body and spirit; if you concern himself with things beautiful, he will come to look upon his work as a thing beautiful.

Let us not at this late date, when all of us have worked so much for it and prayed so devoutly for it, be frightened into an attitude of mind that he is intolerant to new ideas, that he is not receptive. Let us not institute a white terror of oppression in this land of freedom. The danger of the red terror is that it leads to anarchy; the danger of the white terror is that it leads to the red terror. We are great, we are strong,

we are sound, we are healthy in this land. Our institutions are sound, our political organization has stood the test of one hundred and thirty-five years and more; our people are politically educated; they are sane, they are deliberate. Do not, in the name of all that is sacred in American life, establish a new reign of terror in this land where terror should never, never reign.

